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Central
Intelligence

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IRAN PUBS.

Soviet Military Options in Iran

Special National Intelligence Estimate

Top Secret

SNIE 11/34-4-80
21 August 1980

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SNIE 11/34-4-80

SOVIET MILITARY OPTIONS IN IRAN

Information available as of 21 August 1980 was
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of State, and the National Security Agency.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps

THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD REPRESENTING THE PARTICIPATING AGENCIES CONCUR, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

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SUMMARY AND KEY JUDGMENTS

The USSR is taking steps to strengthen the ability of its forces to invade Iran, should Soviet leaders so decide.

On balance, we believe the Soviets have not made a decision to invade Iran. We believe they are likely to pursue their goals in Iran without direct use of military force at least during the next several months.¹

Crucial in the Soviets' calculations about undertaking major military action are their perceptions of US political will and military capabilities in the region.

Although there is little direct intelligence on Soviet intentions, the Soviets might intervene if they believed that:

- There was an emergent low-risk opportunity to gain the enormous economic and geopolitical advantages that control of Iran would bring.²
- The United States was bent on re-creating a position of strength in Iran through military means.

Other circumstances that could trigger Soviet intervention are:

- Serious instability in Iran near the Soviet border.

¹ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Service Intelligence Chiefs believe that these judgments are overstated. There is no evidence to determine whether the Soviets have, in fact, made a decision to invade or not to invade Iran. Moreover, the time frame "at least during the next several months" is also beyond our evidence. To properly reflect the SNIE, they believe the judgment should be:

On balance we believe the Soviets are likely to pursue their goals in Iran without direct use of military force at least over the next month or so. Nonetheless, the USSR is taking steps to strengthen the ability of its forces to invade Iran and may do so particularly if the Soviets believed Iranian developments posed a threat to their security or if the US intervened in Iran.

² The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, does not believe the USSR would see "an emergent low-risk opportunity" for a power-grab military takeover of Iran under current circumstances. He believes that Moscow's cost benefit analysis will lead the Soviet leadership to pursue goals with respect to Iran through other than direct military intervention, at least for the near term.

In his view the most likely motive for a Soviet intervention in Iran would be a conclusion on Moscow's part that a Soviet intervention was needed to preempt an American move to create a position of strength in Iran by military means.

The Soviets would, of course, find the emergence of a potentially viable leftist regime a tempting reason for intervention, but there appears to be little chance that such a political situation will arise. A Soviet move to occupy only the northern areas of Iran would not give Moscow control of the oil resources, it would leave the USSR in a significantly less advantageous position to influence events in the rest of Iran, and the Soviets would probably see such action as likely to elicit a Western counterintervention.

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—A call for assistance from a pro-Soviet faction in Iran that had acquired national or regional power.

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If the Soviets made a calculated decision to invade Iran under conditions in which they believed they could choose the time, such an operation probably [redacted] would be preceded by at least one month of activity to improve the preparedness of the forces [redacted]

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A Soviet decision to seize northwestern Iran probably could be implemented with three to five divisions within two weeks. [redacted]

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If the Soviets perceived a situation threatening their security interests—such as an intervention in Iran by US forces—they probably could hastily assemble a force of some 10 to 12 ill-prepared divisions and launch an attack directed at seizing major objectives in Iran, including some on the Persian Gulf littoral, within about two weeks of a decision to do so [redacted]

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